

THE UNSEEN

Review by
Bobby Dupea



Film-makers, the little ones, never learn. They almost go out of their way to ask for trouble with their titles. I mean...! What else can one truthfully say about Mrs Ringo Starr's new horror trip, **The Unseen**, except... and so it should be!

Of course, one could say that anyway. To be quick, flip and cynical about it. But we're not in the habit of being quick, flip or cynical at **Starburst**, are we? We say what we feel. And if we happen to be unlucky enough to spend yet another 89 minutes in the dark with a film that makes us hit the typewriter in a quick, flip and cynical mood, then so be it. That's what what the film did to us, not vice-versa.

In this instance, the stupid title—because it's obvious to a four-year-old how bad a movie this is—has been retained by a whole new team of film-makers. I haven't got all (or any) griff about the reasons for his last minute succession of ownership, and indeed, creation, but when I first learned about **The Unseen**, shooting had finished and the film was produced by Anthony B. Unger, written and directed by Danny Steinmann, and presented, whatever that means, by Herbert R. Steinmann and Billy Baxter.

The names, admittedly, are nothing to have you running across town and country to the nearest cinema playing **The Unseen** with a high expectation quotient. Mr Unger's monicker seems to ring a bell from the old, the very old Commonwealth United combine, which spawns such high-priced forgettables as Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr's **The Magic Christian** and Peter Ustinov's **Viva Max**. However, I could be muddling him with his presumed kin, Oliver A. Unger, who more recently used Barbra Bach (among others) in **Force Ten from Naverone**. And all I know about Billy Baxter is that he produced a tv special about the Cannes festival the other year.

But as Sam Goldwyn is said to have said, we have all passed a lot of water since then...

When the film opened recently in America (to poor business; it's not bloody enough for our Translantic cousins), the credits read: "produced by Mr Unger" still, but with an executive and a co-producer, written by Michael L. Grace, directed by Peter Fogel and presented (still) by Herbert R. Steinmann, but now in association, as they term it, with Jeffrey Ingber.

Who actually did what with what and to whom, I honestly don't know anymore. (Perhaps Ms Bach can tell us sometime—she's currently near the top of all our interview lists).

But that's *American* credits for you. Political and... buyable. I really don't see how we can set much store by them since the news that a Houston store was selling a screen credit as the ultimate in Christmas gifts. Just 1,250,000 dollars for the privilege of working on Bob Evan's next project, **The Cotton Club**, and winding up with a 'production associate' credit on screen. Hah! (Texas millionaires out to get Junior something real cute for Xmas were, no doubt, further delighted to note that the price of this gift was... tax-deductible!)

All of which has nothing to do with **The Unseen**, beyond assisting in putting off the moment of truth a little longer.

Barbara Bach looks good. That's the good news. And from the outset, this looks as if it could be a film John Brosnan, sundry readers and myself could go for. BB is a woman in jeopardy. Again... Or, tragically, as the film soon proves, it's her career which is in the worst jeopardy.

The bad news is that she's far from her usual vibrant self. Well, she is pregnant in the story. Furthermore, she is arguing with her



This spread: A selection of scenes from the forthcoming horror, **The Unseen**. No prizes for guessing which is Barbara Bach. Karen Lamb is on the left of the above picture and the retarded monster is played by Stephen Furst. Not a lot more to say is there?



ex-footballer lover about an abortion. She's for. He's against. By the end of the film, such a move should be superfluous.

BB plays Jane Fonda. Yes, *another* tv newslady. Sorry, tv newsperson. She's covering a Danish Day festival in a California town, Solvang, with her two women (er, person) crew. They are the tops at their trade, very together persons. And yet, they'd never thought of booking hotel rooms for the trip. So what do they do, these telly professionals, but take rooms in the kind of out of town mansion that is so instantly suspicious that not even Norman Bates would be seen dead in it.

The joint is run by the similarly suspicious and remote Sydney Lassick. You'll remember Syd from **Cuckoo's Nest**. He's still somewhat cuckoo. Shifty. And apparently out to win Solvang's Ernie Borgnine Clone contest. He lives with his sister, Leila Goldoni. Live with, is right. . . The result of their incestuous affair is the inevitable monster killer locked in the basement.

"It's not right," say Leila as the new guests check in. "They could find out."

Could, has nothing to do with it. Of course they will!

Lois Young's sound-recordist is first to go . . . which doesn't help Barbara's tele-film in town, nor the one on screen. Lois is attacked, as the script has it, by an unknown force . . . She's stuffed into a furnace vent, her head twisted and broken, sticking out of the opening. Blood is everywhere and in true Norman Bates manner, Leila Goldoni, cleans up the mess . . . just in time for Karen Lamb's blonde cinematographer (Barbara's sister but don't let that plot-line worry you) to be spilled all over the place again.

Poor Leila. A woman's work is just never done!

Stephen Furst, from **Animal House**, is the huge and retarded offspring to whom killing is a game. He's sort something of a man-child and looks as if he's strayed in this film from a Fellini set. Rather in keeping with John Landis' **American Werewolf**, here's another case of after **Animal House**, a different kind of animal . . .

The rest of the script—whoever wrote it—is written by numbers. Not a single shock or surprise in what goes on, except in how badly it is constructed, shot and acted.

Make-up effects by Craig Reardon and Harry Woolman show some thought, design and even feeling for the genre. Nothing else does. Fogel allows Lassick and Goldoni to go way, but way over the top. They chew more scenery than when Faye Dunaway played Joan Crawford and Crawford lost. Whether this limp rag of a film is imported to Europe in any fashion other than a fast buck video cassette, remains to be unseen ●

The Unseen (1981)

Barbara Bach (*as Jennifer Fast*), Sydney Lassick (*Ernest Keller*), Stephen Furst (*Junior*), Leila Goldoni (*Virginia Keller*), Karen Lamm (*Karen Fast*), Doug Barr (*Tony Ross*), Lois Young (*Vicki Thompson*). Directed by **Peter Fogel**, Script by **Michael L. Grace**, Photography by **Roberto Quezada**, Additional photography by **Irv Goodnott**, **James Carter**, Edited by **Jonathan Braun**, Music by **Michael J. Lewis**, Make-up design by **Craig Reardon**, Special effects by **Harry Woolman**, Stunt co-ordination by **Sonny Shields**, Produced by **Anthony B. Unger**, Co-producer, **Don P. Behrus**, Executive producer, **Howard Goldfarb**.

A Triune Films production for US release by World Northall Films.
Time: 89 mins